

make progress on the matters I have outlined here today and that the obstruction that has stalled our further progress will not be continued. Let us move forward together in the best interest of the American people. Any Senator can prevent action on an item in these waning days of the session. There is no secret or magic about that. The question for Senators this month is whether they are willing to put aside minor differences and partisan agendas to join with us in making progress and moving forward.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following my statement, the Senator from Colorado be recognized.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

IRAQ

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I listened with interest to my friend from Kentucky comment about my statement on Iraq and the importance of disengagement with the withdrawal of American troops. I don't intend to restate my positions on the war this afternoon. I came to the floor to address another issue. But I will point out that one of the best votes I have cast in the Senate was in opposition to the resolution, supported by the Senator from Kentucky, that took us into Iraq, where American forces have been fighting for a longer time than all of World War II and where we see the continued loss of American lives—some 37 American lives lost last month—and billions in taxpayer dollars flooding into the sands of Iraq. Still, there is not the reconciliation by the Iraqi political leadership to develop some kind of Government that could be the basis for independence in the future. As our brave men and women are fighting gallantly and with great valor there, they are entitled to a policy that is worthy of their valor. Today they are effectively being held hostage by Iraqi politicians who refuse to negotiate among themselves and form a government. That might be satisfactory to the Senator from Kentucky but not to the

Senator from Massachusetts. Evidently, the Senator from Kentucky wants to give a blank check to the Iraqi politicians: Continue your squabbles over there, while we continue to see the loss of American lives and blood.

Not the Senator from Massachusetts. They have had their time. What is going to convince the Iraqi politicians we are serious? What will send the message is when we demonstrate that we are starting to withdraw American troops. Then they are going to make political judgments for their survival.

But not today. If the Senator from Kentucky wants to continue an open-ended commitment with American lives and American treasure, that is his position. It is not mine. I don't think that is where the American people are.

How long is it going to take for the Iraqi politicians to get together? They are not doing it now. They didn't do it yesterday. They don't appear to be willing to do it tomorrow, even though we have had assurances from the administration that success was around the corner.

This is a matter of enormous importance and consequence. We will continue the debate. That is why I am a strong supporter of what our leader pointed out earlier today, talking about a proposal that has been put forward in terms of what is called bridge funding.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I rise to take a few moments to talk about the state of our economy. I do so because during the break, I had the opportunity to talk with a lot of people in my own State of Massachusetts. Our State is not greatly different from many other States, certainly in the northeastern and central part of the Nation, older industrial States. The conclusion of working families and the middle class is pretty consistent across the country, that the state of our economy has given working families a good deal of fear.

Let me review quickly what our current situation is. The vast majority of Americans are anxious about the economy. This is from the latest poll in November of 2007: 78 percent say the economy is getting worse, the most negative outlook in the past 16 years. We have to ask ourselves: Is this a Democratic, Independent or Republican view? Let's look across the spectrum: 89 percent of Democrats feel that way, and these are representatives of working families; Independents are 78 percent. Even among Republicans, 65 percent believe the economy is getting worse.

This sense of anxiety about a growing economy has been there for some time. Look where it was in January of 2001. Fifty-six percent of Americans were concerned about the economy. Now look at November of 2007. It has gone from 56 percent to 78 percent who are concerned about the economy.

Let's look at how working families view the future for the next generation, their children. Working families feel insecure about their children's economic future. This is a current assessment of how working families view what is going to happen to their children: 23 percent believe their children will be better off than they are today; 30 percent believe their children will have the same future as they have; and 42 percent believe their children will be worse off than today. This is a defining aspect of what our country is about. It is about the American dream. It is about hope and opportunity, not only for themselves but for their children and their children's children. When you lose that hope, you begin to lose working families' views about the American dream.

This chart shows an explanation of why this has happened. We are growing further apart in terms of wages and productivity for middle-income families. From 1947 to 1962, as we came out of World War II, as productivity increased, wages increased, and the economy went along together, all of the different quintiles of the American economy went along together. We all grew together. There was a sense of optimism and hope because we had a shared economy, a shared future. But look at what has happened in terms of real wages and productivity. Productivity has escalated 205 percent. Wages have effectively gone up about 5 percent over the last 7 years in terms of real dollars and the rest of that productivity has gone to the wealthiest individuals.

One of the principle reasons is because wages have effectively remained stagnant. We have seen what has happened to the price of gasoline. It is up 66 percent. Health care is up 38 percent. Education is up 43 percent. Home ownership is up nearly 40 percent, and effectively wages are stagnant at 5 percent. These are the things that families are concerned about, how they are going to get to work. How they are going to be able to afford health care, to send their children to school? Are they going to have a home?

This is what all of us have seen in many of the colder regions of the country. As the temperature drops, home heating oil prices have gone through the roof: \$1.83 a gallon in 2001; in 2007, \$3.29. It has gone up 33 percent in real terms since last year. So homes have gotten more expensive. Education is more expensive. Fuel is more expensive. Health care is more expensive. Heating oil is more expensive. This has all contributed to the growth of insecurity.

The price of food has risen faster than the rate of inflation. Whether it is a pound of beef or whether it is eggs, prices are rising up to 50 percent faster than the rate of inflation. Even milk is higher than the rate of inflation.

All of this has been happening while working families have been working longer and harder than those in any other industrial nation of the world.